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Vox - et præterea nihil. Hor.

When you have nothing to say, say nothing.
Old Proverb.

It is occasionally necessary to dissemble a knowledge of that with which we are unacquainted; - at least it is sometimes expedient. But it is often of the highest importance to pretend ignorance or say nothing about what we perfectly understand. The first proposition is least capable of defence; - and, as might be expected, men

exemplify it very rare, to its disadvantage. The latter is a precept founded in wisdom and policy and little attended to by the generality of the human race. It never found a place in the canons of the female world, being directly contrary to the very spirit of their nature, design & influence. How sweet is nonsense on a ruby lip! How it can sweeten insipidity and extract the venom and the sting of slander!

With you then ye fair chatterboxes we have indeed nothing to do! 'Free as the air and licens'd libertines,' happy is man, that his brow can be unbent, his sorrows sooth'd and his moments of vacancy filled up, by your ingenious modifications of nonentity! The light of beauty plays on the darkness of nothing like the undetected lustre that breaks on the mists in the Sicilian straits, while the enrapt

beholder gazes and admires, till he fan:
:cies he can trace amid the shadowy con:
:figurations, symmetry, elegance, existence.
We admire the effect of both phaenomena,
the causes and operations of them both are
alike inscrutable and mysterious.

To the other division of our species are
then remarks then addressed. Longinus
remarks that the silence of Ajax, in some
part of the Iliad, (we forget where) is more
expressive and sublime than any number
of words would have been. How often this
is perceivable on a small scale, in com:
:mon life, we have all probably felt by
experience;- who has not found himself
in a disagreeable situation, in the course
of his life, either from witnessing the em:
barrasment of others, or from being him:
self an object of pity?

Many are the evils of talking a great deal

when you have nothing to say. Supposing no other harm done, it occasions a mental disease, similar to that produced in the body by similar regimen;- the mind becomes incapable for a time of swallowing salutary food. It rejects solids with loathing. But we will find in ninety nine cases out of a hundred, that he who talks long when he has nothing of any importance to communicate, will injure himself much, either in the good estimation of his fellow men, either as to talent or discretion or probity.

Let no man trust to the brilliance of his talents, when he embarks on the chaos of nonentity. They make light up a few sparks of real brightness, amid the phosphoric gleaming of rottenness and putrescence, but rarely will they illumine his path through the blackness. If you talk of nothing, every one will easily

dread the conclusion which you began at, that you have nothing to talk of.

When the tongue runs away with the reason and we are fairly afloat, many things are dropped in the way which may ruin a man's character for discretion. Offence may be given, where it was never intended, merely for want of a little previous reflections. Infinite are the finer chords which are connected with the heart, extending by the magic weavings of self-love to kindred, friend and country. A careless remark, a trifling suspicion may touch their secret tones, till the whole system is irritated and roused to contempt, anger or revenge. The experience of every one will instantly suggest examples of such effects being produced and if we recur to first causes, we will often find that the harmony of many a social circle has been for the time entirely

destroyed, good friends changed into the most bitter enemies, and often lives lost on the field of honor, because one of the company would talk, when he had nothing to say.

Again, before we are aware of it, talking on the bottom of nothing will lead us to slander, backbite and defame others. As mud [redacted] are bred from putrefaction, so are these evil habits produced in discourse, which has no life or soul or energy. To slander an enemy behind his back, is of all things most dastardly and contemptible. To slander a friend, is of all things most ridiculously absurd - letting alone in either case, the moral depravity which it evinces, and to the score of which it will be laid by others :- when often the only reason of our slandering our neighbours is, that we will "take words" and put them forth, which

leaves no

have no meaning whatever -

Opposites produce very often the same effect. This is the case with weak words and strong liquors. Under the influence of both, discretion, the key of the soul, slips out of our fingers; - out comes all we ought to conceal - promises are violated - secrets betrayed! Who is there that is particularly anxious, to acquire the character of a man who is not to be trusted - in whom no confidence can be placed - of an eavesdropper - a serpent in the grass - or a fool? Let him talk, till he has let out of the bag the old cat and all her different kittens, as the vulgar adage has it - let him disclose a few secrets and his dearest wish ~~will be~~ be gratified.

Enough; - it is superfluous to dwell on the nature and deleterious effects of the vices enumerated and their concomitant evils. We deem it clear and sufficiently convincing, that

they do result from the bad habit of which we are speaking.

Let us consider for a moment the opposite advantages, which flow from holding the tongue. The old proverb says, "A wise man may pass for a fool if he talks too much;- and a fool may pass for a wise man, if he keeps silence." The latter is only a contingency to be sure, and perhaps a remote one;- the former frequently takes place. "Silence" says Shakspeare

— is only commendable
In a neat's tongue dried- & a maid not vendible;"—

To effect a character of the latter description to deserve commendation by giving ear to the poets' exceptions, were to look for a miracle, stranger than any which has ever been performed. But without impugning this sarcasm of the bard of Avon, which never was meant for any thing but a squirt, we may observe that silence unless the

unless the person observing it is under the hands of the Inquisition, or produced as an evidence in Court, will never bring him into any scrape or dilemma. No inadvertent expression, dropped by chance, will take root in heat or misrepresentation and rise up in judgment against him;- no friends will be lost;- no rash promises will be unthinkingly made, whose ghosts might have tormented him forever afterwards.

Let it be understood. By silence, we do not mean to convey the idea, of want of curtesy - which dictates some sort of a response to every interrogatory. He must have little ingenuity, who cannot avoid without breaking the ninth commandment, a question which he ought not to answer, without rudeness or incivility. Nay, such a mode of conduct, would often prove worse, than communicating all you

know at once. "Silence gives consent" is a maxim which from its application to matters in love, has been extended to every question, and has grown so very trite, that the negroes are heard retailing it along the streets. Discretion will always assist her votaries out of a difficulty, without either compelling them to have recourse to stupid muteness or ignoble leasing. She will not justify the latter; - for want of virtue is always a want of true policy - whatever statesmen may say to the contrary, when the principle is confined to this world only. Need we say, that setting aside the moral turpitude of the offence, the remotest possibility of being detected in one falsehood or equivocation, is far worse than any certainty of being involved in a dilemma, the awkwardness of which arises not from any derelic-

tion of principle, but merely from the principe of curtesy? — With respect to the alternative, stupid muteness, we may observe, by way of example, that when you return an embarrass'd answer, or none at all, to a question concerning a friends character, inferences the most unfavourable will be drawn. Conjecture will wander till she goes beyond the mark. Use conditionally then and surmises, when you can neither speak favourably of a person, in the past or present tense. Discretion will apply to the characters of the living, what respect does to those of the departed — when she can say nothing to their credit, she will set down nothing against them. It is not with characters as it is with coins. A thief is as much a thief as ever, who is hung in the same gallows with a mur-

derer - and above all, when the person who wishes to shine by contrast, impliedly institutes the comparison himself, he is most lamentably deceived, if he thinks he will come with renewed beauty, out of the filth he has been raking up. The white teeth of the modest chimney sweep are brilliant in the midst of soot and blackness; - but he has taken no pains to clean them; neither has he been to particularly anxious to defile the rest of his apparel and physiognomy. They have come so by their own act.

We are arguing merely on principles of policy: - but when the children of light happen to be as wise, even in their own generation, as the children of this world, then is he indeed devoid of reason who mingles not in their counsels.

Having thus contemplated, without much method, the prominent advanta-

=ges of silence on some occasions and the co=
=respondent disadvantages of talking too
much, let us consider the remedy for
their cacoethes sermonis - we say sermo=
=nis, for it is in conversation, that our
discretion is left in the lurch.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" -
and this habit of which we speak is not one
of the least of its evils. If we observe the
conduct of a severe student, who bends all
his faculties to deep research, we may occa=
=sionally discern pedantry; sometimes a little
too much vanity for public exhibition - nay,
sometimes he will talk too much - but the
latter vice is rarely the attribute of profound
scholars. They have so much to communi=
=cate, that they acquire the habit of con=
=tracting rather than of pouring their
ideas - But they scarcely ever are driven
to the spiderlike spinning out of sententi=

by. In trifling company, they may feel out of their element,- their presence may be a source of embarassment. But some are inspired by their slander;- and in proportion to the development of the understanding, discretion acquires the mastery of the tongue. Indeed we may resolve the effect into different causes- The mind is too much absorbed in listening to the murmur of the ocean of eyes, to hear the malicious whisperings of the pestilent breeze of slander- The eye when gazing on the font of light, marks not the motes that swim in the tide around it. Never go to a real student to acquire a fund of small talk. He draws his bills on a different firm- from the exchequer of fashion.

Here then is the only remedy we can suggest as infallible. Volition has no

control over the commotions of an empty stomach: and discretion cannot acquire the perfect mastery of the mind, when it is filled with nothing, as an Irish man would express himself. But a fund of information will prove a never failing ballast, amid the turbulent swell of different sympathies, the bellowings of slander and the lowering canopy of envy.

We are aware that this vice is constitutional. that some persons are very discreet and silent, who are very phlegmatic, cold, unfeeling and ignorant. but if these heterocliles are to be thrust in the teeth of every precept monger, farewell instruction!

S.

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